

Leading by Example

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Having worked with the TREASURE Forest program for almost 20 years, I have often stated that a landowner's actions, more than advice from agency personnel, are more likely to influence their neighbors' land management decisions. I heard this "mentoring" message at a landowner conference many years ago. I must admit that at the time, I did not give it much credence. However, many years and even more TREASURE Forest certifications later, I have come to realize the importance of mentoring. Although I have a good understanding of mentoring, I recently received a refresher course during a TREASURE Forest inspection.

I have long held that most TREASURE Forests are developed over time, through a relationship with a landowner, rather than a property being "found ready" for certification. However, during a recent inspection I learned once again that both methods are possible. My first contact with the property owned by Mike Sanford was at the request of AFC County Forester Blake Kelley. Blake told me that he had been working with Mr. Sanford and things were progressing well on the timber management front;

however, he needed a few wildlife management recommendations. We soon made a visit and once there, I found that a prescribed burning program was in place, a harvested area had been reforested, and a lake built and stocked with

erty. The landowner had requested that we meet him at 6:00 p.m. if possible. Seeing how the temperature was averaging around 96 degrees everyday, I had no problem with the evening inspection. AFC Regional Management Specialist

Alan Williams and I arrived at the property a bit early and while waiting for Blake and Mike, we conversed with Mike's grandfather. I had known Mr. Reedy Patterson for several years, but I had never visited his property. I found it interesting that Mr. Patterson, who is 90 years old, stated that he just couldn't work like he used to and with the weather as hot as it was, he could only work outside until about noon. I nodded my head as if it were the same for me; however, inwardly I was thinking I wish I *could* work in this heat until noon!

Mr. Sanford arrived and after introductions we climbed on golf carts and began the

inspection. I was very impressed with the many accomplishments he had made on the land, although I was even more impressed with what he had to say concerning his motivation for managing the

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Mike Sanford (left) with his grandparents, Ozeal and Reedy Patterson.

fish. As Blake had suspected, the tract did need more open area for wildlife. This and other recommendations were given to Mike who quickly went to work to implement them.

Within a few months, Blake contacted me to schedule an inspection of the prop-

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property. As we viewed the combination fishing lake/swimming park with the nice pier and floating trampoline, Sanford explained that when he was growing up his deepest desire was to spend time with his grandparents at their place in the country. He talked about the many days he spent working on the property with his grandfather and how those times had nurtured his love for the land. It was a dream-come-true for him when he was allowed to purchase a portion of the property. Mike went on to say that his goals were two-fold in nature: he obviously wanted to improve the property, but his number one objective was to foster a love of the land in his own family. He further explained that he felt that he has made progress with his youngest daughter who has developed a passion for the property, and his wife who has also come to greatly enjoy the trips to the woods.

As we finished the inspection, we told Mike that things looked good and we would submit a nomination to the subcommittee. We explained that certification was important since it was one of the best ways to mentor others concerning proper stewardship. At this point, Sanford stated that he had a request for us. He went on to explain that his mentor had been his grandfather. He began to tell about all the things his grandfather had done on his property, and how his granddad had made it clear that proper management was a prerequisite before he would agree to sell it to him. Mike stated that if his own property was good enough for certification, he was certain that Mr. Patterson's land would also qualify. He then asked that we consider performing an inspection on his grandfather's property. We had not at all anticipated this request, but agreed to perform the inspection.

After discussing objectives, we started out across the property. Mike pointed out that the trails we were riding were developed and maintained by Mr. Patterson, so that he could "keep an eye on things." We traveled through an area of pines where prescribed burning had been completed and through several wildlife open-

ings. Some of the openings contained fruit trees that Mr. Patterson had planted "to give the deer a little something." We then viewed an open field that had been burned "to keep it looking decent." We also noted numerous birdhouses and feeders, not to mention many aesthetically pleasing practices.

By the end of the inspection, it was easy to see how Mike had been influenced, and it was also obvious that both properties were worthy of certification.

Although coming up with a management plan on short notice put Blake in a bit of a bind, he felt, as did Alan and I, that this situation was worth a little extra effort. The plan was completed; both nominations were submitted and approved. It was my honor to present the grandparents and their grandson with their TREASURE Forest certifications.

While working in the wildlife profession for the past twenty years, something that stands out like a sore thumb is the paucity of young people involved in the outdoors. It is unfortunate that the one thing missing in the lives of many young people today is someone to develop their love of the land; someone who will pass on a land ethic. In today's fast paced high-tech society, many young people

view nature as something slow and boring. This is likely due to the fact that they have never chased tadpoles or heard a gobbler shatter the morning calm. Maybe they've never had anyone tell them to go outside and "don't come back until you are filthy!"

If you have the opportunity to mentor a child – whether it is your child, a grand child, or the kid down the road, do your best to pass on a love for the land. The future of our natural resources may very well depend on it! ♣

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